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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 001243

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/02/2018  
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SUBJECT: COE HUMAN RIGHTS HEAD SEES GROWING DICHOTOMY IN  
THE NORTH CAUCASUS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Alice G. Wells for reasons  
1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: COE Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg noted during his April 18-26 visit to Russia that while Chechnya is making progress on the protection of human rights, the situation in neighboring Dagestan and Ingushetiya is becoming more violent. In his meeting with Putin, Hammarberg asked for more GOR efforts to find the estimated 3,000 people missing in Chechnya, including the identification of bodies found in 50 mass graves there. Hammarberg left reportedly pleased with the progress he had seen in Chechnya, and with the fact that Putin and Medvedev met with him, but the message from the GOR on implementing human rights standards and ratifying COE protocols was not promising. End Summary.

Engaging the Kremlin  
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¶2. (C) During his April 18-26 visit to Russia, Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg held extensive high-level meetings and visited three northern Caucasus republics -- Chechnya, Ingushetiya and Dagestan -- which have been at the forefront of concern by international human rights organizations. In addition to separate sessions with Putin and President-elect Medvedev, Hammarberg met with foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Prosecutor General Yuriy Chaika, Minister of Health and Social Development Tatyana Golikova and representatives from the Ministry of Justice.

¶3. (C) In his 25 meetings with Putin and Medvedev, Hammarberg emphasized that there remained human rights issues in the region, even though kidnappings in Chechnya were less common and there had been no reports of torture in the former breakaway republic for more than a year. (Note: North Caucasus expert Tanya Lokshina from the Moscow office of Human Rights Watch believes that since Ramzan Kadyrov became president of Chechnya in April 2007, fewer people are willing to report abductions and instances of torture for fear of angering government authorities, upon whose assistance they are dependent to find their relatives. End Note). Hammarberg also told Putin that the GOR should work to resolve the problem of the missing if there is to be lasting stability. (Aleksandr Machevskiy, an advisor in the Presidential Administration on Russia's relations with Europe who organized the COE delegation's visit, reminded us of Russian interest in finding and identifying Russian soldiers who are also missing as a result of the two Chechen wars.) Hammarberg told reporters after his meeting with Medvedev that their discussions focused on the future cooperation between Russia and the COE, but a contact at the Swedish Embassy told up that Hammarberg left Moscow disappointed that there was no agreement on several outstanding bilateral issues to continue implementing human rights standards, as well as no progress on the ratification of Protocol 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights and Russia's complete

abolishment of the death penalty.

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14. (C) According to Machevskiy, Hammarberg was struck by the progress Chechnya is making on human rights, along with the large amount of money being spent to reconstruct the war-ravaged republic. Machevskiy told us the trip was a balance of meetings with government officials, including several two-hour long meetings with each of the presidents of the three Caucasus republics, as well as discussions with representatives of human rights organizations and ordinary citizens. Unlike previous groups that visited the North Caucasus, Machevskiy said that the COE delegation, which included several hand-picked Russian and foreign journalists, overnights at a new hotel adjacent to Grozny's airport.

15. (C) In his public statements Hammarberg was more nuanced, citing progress in Chechnya, especially on the reduced reports of torture and kidnapping, but noting that there remain a large number of missing persons. Shortly after Hammarberg's visit to Chechnya, the European Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg ordered the GOR to pay 72,000 euros for "material and moral damages" to a Chechen woman whose son and son-in-law disappeared in May 2001. Hammarberg promised locals in Chechnya he would use his best efforts to convince Moscow to open a DNA-testing facility in the capital Grozny (according to Machevskiy, such analysis is now performed in Rostov-on-Don and Moscow). Hammarberg also undertook to raise with Russian officials the increase in incidents of xenophobia against Chechens living in other parts of Russia, and lastly, to look at the possibility that Chechens are treated more harshly under the Russian penal system. Jo

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Hegenauer, head of UNHCR's North Caucasus regional office, told RefCoord that he had an hour-long lunch with Hammarberg in Chechnya, who told him he was impressed by Chechen Ombudsman Nudri Nukhazhiyev. Hegenauer himself thinks that Nukhazhiyev is a "work in progress." Immediately following the COE delegation's visit, Nukhazhiyev praised Chechen President Kadyrov for meeting regularly with human rights activists.

16. (SBU) In his meeting with President Murat Zyazikov of Ingushetiya, Hammarberg focused on extrajudicial killing and the use of excessive force against individuals who are detained. He noted that the use of indiscriminate force by security services increases bitterness among civilians who then begin to themselves support the insurgents. Zyazikov reportedly agreed that any use of unlawful force would make law enforcement appear no better than the terrorists themselves against whom they are struggling.

17. (C) In Dagestan, the GOR pulled out all the stops, flying Hammarberg and his entourage by helicopter to a remote military base in the mountains near the village of Botlikh to which Putin also made a surprise visit earlier this year. It was from this region that Chechen insurgents began an attack in Dagestan in 1999 after which Putin promised to base security forces permanently in the area when he became president. According to the internet-based Caucasian Knot newspaper, no ordinary residents were invited to meet with Hammarberg during his visit to Botlikh. During a two-hour meeting with Dagestan leader Mukhu Aliyev, Hammarberg reiterated his earlier warning to Zyazikov that actions by law enforcement that harm innocent civilians or violate human rights will result in a vicious cycle of increased violence. Hammarberg also met with representatives from an NGO made up of mothers whose sons have disappeared in Dagestan.

Comment

18. (C) Machevskiy noted that because of the long-standing

"friendly" dialogue, the COE carries much more weight with the GOR on these issues than either the U.S., the EU or its individual member-states. In reality, the GOR plays the generally tamer COE human rights representatives against their U.S. and other European counterparts. Some leading human rights representatives here continue to be disappointed that there is not stronger condemnation of Russia's human rights record by the COE.

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